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## Parachute Training in the "Para" - Divisions of Sokol

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1. At the end of January 1951, Sokol organizations undertook a project to recruit youths for parachute training. This was accomplished with the aid of posters, advertisements in movie houses, lectures, etc. The training was pictured as a sport, as pre-military preparation and as a great success in the Soviet Union. All men and women over 16 years of age could qualify for this training provided the following conditions were fulfilled:
  - (a) The applicant had to be in good health (thorough examination by a physician).
  - (b) He or she had to be a member of the Sokol and the Union of Czechoslovak Youth.
  - (c) The applicant had to present a favorable recommendation from his cadre officer concerning his political reliability.
2. If the applicant fulfilled these requirements, he was accepted as a member of the Para-Division in the Sokol organization. Such Para-Divisions were established in all district capitals. Within a month, the enlisted members were summoned to take a thorough medical examination which was given by the National Institute of Health. Emphasis was placed on heart condition, lungs, eyes and general physical appearance. Only persons found to be politically reliable were admitted to these medical examinations. Approximately 10% of all applicants were rejected because of unsatisfactory health.
3. In Olomouc the procedure was as follows: one week after the medical examination, members were called to the Sokol-house in Olomouc, given a training schedule, introduced to the instructors and issued training uniforms. Winter training in the Sokol gymnasium was first on the schedule. The next phase consisted of outdoor training preliminary to the first training jump.
4. Instructors, experienced airborne troops, were assigned to duties in the district towns where such Para-divisions were established. Green linen uniforms, boots, trousers, belt and a red beret were the initial issue of clothing. After the first jump, members received a battle uniform and a red beret (both on the style of the British uniform). On the left sleeve was the emblem of a winged parachute, beneath which were chevrons or stars, depending on the member's rank. Political instructors had a gold chevron on a blue field. The regional instructors had three, five-point stars on a red field. District instructors had two such stars and local instructors only one star.
5. Indoor training dealt primarily with politics, the Red Army, parachutists in the Soviet Union, importance of airborne troops for defensive purposes.

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6. On 1 Apr 51 outdoor training began with running exercises, leaping over hurdles, crawling under barbed wire obstacles, jumping over trenches, springing with the aid of a peleser rope and scaling a five meter wall. Forced marches were held on Sunday. A great deal of time was spent working with the compass on these marches.
7. With basic training completed on 23 Jun 51, the final week of training and examinations began in Prerov. All members were quartered in the agricultural school near a training area equipped with special structures for parachute jumping. During that one week, jumping from a stationary plane, dress and use of parachutes, orders for jumping, etc were taught. Because the area had no permanent parachute-drop training tower, preliminary jumping was performed in the following manner: a wooden tower, 6 to 7 meters high, was equipped with fixed steel lines and parachute harnesses. The participants jumped from that height and remained suspended in the harnesses. This exercise was carried out because the sudden pressure is approximately the same as when jumping with a parachute. An old plane fuselage was utilized to teach entering the plane, preparation before take-off, attitude during flight and finally jumping from the plane. This exercise was performed with parachutes. As a final test, the members were required to jump from a flying plane.
8. Members of the board of examiners were instructors from the Brno region. The examination consisted of questions concerning various procedures and actions prior to jumping and political theory. Ten outstanding students received awards, usually books (Fucik - The Story of a True Man - Pribek Skutečného Člověka).
9. The first live jump was made at the civilian Olomouc-Holice airport. Ninety-four members, ten of whom were women, from the Prerov, Olomouc and Prostějov Para-Divisions participated in this exercise. Officers from the Olomouc garrison, political functionaries and government representatives were in attendance. The plane used for this exercise was a Czechoslovak Airlines (CSA) DC3. It was specially equipped for airborne operations and had the sign "OK-WAK" painted on its side. The jumps were made directly over the airport at an altitude of approximately 300 meters. The first jump was made individually, later three to five students jumped simultaneously. All parachutes (German Made) were supplied by the military administration. Each participant had two parachutes; one on the back and the other attached to the stomach. During the jumps several serious injuries occurred, including broken legs and many brain concussions. According to the experts present, the exercise was a complete success and all phases of instruction were accomplished. The first live jump terminated all training for the time being.
10. In March 1952, the participants were again invited to the Sokol gymnasium in Olomouc and informed that training would continue. Instructions in use of the rifle, machine gun, hand grenades, radio operation and procedure, range firing, terrain appreciation, techniques of command and organization of battle were the main courses.
11. Because of the favorable results produced by parachute training all over the country, a new organization, "Doslet" (Dobrovolný Svaz Letectví - Voluntary Union of Fliers), was established at the end of 1951. This organization has its headquarters in Prague and will have a branch office in every district. Every branch office has its divisions, eg the branch office in Olomouc has the "police division" (for members of the National Security Corps), division "Sokol", Division of military academy graduates, and division of teachers. The idea is strongly supported by the public authorities and finds many adherents among the Czech youth.

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